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¹ "Air, Sun Water" poster by Julian Liebermann, Berlin, 1926. Part of a public health campaign by OZE (Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews) -YIVO Archive

In writing this piece we found ourselves drawn to the subcultures of the European Diaspora that existed between the Pogroms and the ashes of the Shoah. We saw our own faces in the photos of youth movements, boxing clubs, gangs and political parties. Though at times they stood at odds, these groups closely resembled each other and fulfilled similar roles. They offered young people a place to escape the poverty and rigidity of the Shtetl, as well as the chaos of the Ghetto. They provided fulfillment, structure, protection from pogroms, comradeship, and welfare.

In the end they fought and died together. Their legacy is often spoken of dismissively for lacking clairvoyance about their coming doom. Because of this, we are taught to be ashamed of their world. We call this opinion self-hate, a form of internal discrimination. Whether the Shoah proved the necessity of Israel or not is irrelevant. In the days before the Fire, many Yids would have seen Zionism and Diasporism as being of similar value. Today, more than half of us still live in the Diaspora. This is an old pattern harkening back to the days when some chose Babylon instead of returning to Jerusalem after the building of the second temple. We who choose Diaspora remain one half of the people, just as those who choose Israel remain the other half. Neither is purer than the other, neither is without sin.

We do not advocate crude reenactments as Zionists, Socialists, or Bundists. Rather, we pose the question, what are we left with now? We are facing a new era of social expulsion and multi-pronged antisemitism. Our Secularism is fractured and sterile. Our Zionism is bloodthirsty, short-sighted, and dependent on the goodwill of powerful antisemites. Our Orthodoxy is as hyper isolated as ever. What can be done by we Yids to find each other again? How do we extract ourselves from the assimilation that has poisoned our souls even as it turns upon us? How can we renounce the vicious factionalism, racism and misogyny of those who call themselves our leaders? How can we be better together? How can we be greater? How can we be more ferocious?

How can we prepare for the next thousand years?

- Di Luftmenschen



² Maccabi sports association members in Kraków, Poland. 1938 YIVO/United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Fred Eichner



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³ "Vote for the Jewish Folkspartey." Yiddish poster. Artwork by Solomon Borisovich Iudovin. Printed by B. Sokolov, 1918. (YIVO)

And Now We Are Two



In those days, in the North, after the lightbulb and before the death trains, the Yids lived in tribes. They had no physical temple, few judges, no kings. They lacked borders amongst themselves, but lived between the borders that were thrust upon them. They called the land home but not homeland. As the modern world swept in on a tempest of steel and factories and pogroms, these tribes began to take on a sharper shape. As is often the case with tribes, they had their flags, their colors, their secret slang and rituals.

Amongst the wise, there is still debate about how many tribes there were. Some say there were only five, some eight, some a dozen. Just as Rabbi Akiva can split hairs about plagues and miracles, so too could they split hairs about this. And that was to say nothing of the others, spread along the skeletons of the old Roman roads. In North Africa, Ethiopia, Persia, perched in the mountains of the Caucasus and the valleys of the Balkans...Who could say how many there were?

But to those northern tribes, who called themselves "Yid" there was not so much thought given to their long estranged cousins. For the purpose of the story, let us say that there were five groups of these Northerners at the dawn of the modern age: The four tribes of **Fray Yids**, who chose a worldly life,

⁴ A General Electoral Bloc." Der sheygets (The Delinquent), Warsaw, 8 October 1930. Cartoon satirizing the not unusual situation of Jewish political parties entering into uneasy alliances in order to form parliamentary blocs. Here, the parties are shown beating each other mercilessly. (Left to right) Agudas Yisroel, Zionist, Mizrahi, Folkist, Artisan, Merchant. (YIVO)

and the **Frum Yids**, who lived first for God, as they do now and have for as long as anyone can remember.

About the **Frum** there is little to say that has not already been said by themselves or by Fray peoples wiser than us. Most of us have relatives who choose, or were born, to live the old way, most of us harbor some degree of contempt and romanticization for their way of life. Suffice to say, the most important thing to remember about the Frum, is that they too lived through the Years of Fire. And though they present with great pride a certain atmosphere of timelessness, they too emerged forever changed by the days of death.

Amongst the Fray there were:

The Communists, who sought salvation through mass revolution. They wished to bend the whole world to the way of the laborer. How could a Yid be exploited if all people were equal amongst each other? What did it matter who had killed Christ if God himself was dead?

The Zionsts, who sought salvation through colonization. They were the dreamers of far away lands. Orientalists, who revived the old language as a language of “race,” “conquest” and “destiny.” What place did Yids have in this frozen white world, when the desert still called? In the age of the steam boat, the photograph, the airplane, the gun, what was preventing a return to the promised land?

The Assimilationists, who sought salvation through integration. Surely, they argued, Yids will be accepted into this modern world if they leave their old ways. All around we see the backwards peasants and lords replaced by factories and universities. In order to have a place in this new enlightenment, the Yid must also abandon his grotesques. “No more Yiddish,” they argued, “no more beards, no more separation. The NATION will accept us if we accept it.”

The Folkists. These were the final group, and perhaps the smallest, though perhaps the most influential upon their peers even as they were dismissed by them. “Our homeland is wherever we are, and our culture is our own,” they cheered. They believed that a Yid travels, and brings the nation on his back. Palestine or Ukraine, both were the same. Each culture should rule themselves, and cooperate to live beside one another. But one must never dominate the other.

We will not include the **Capitalists**. Just as capitalism for capitalism's sake erodes and corrupts cultural movements today, so too did it then. Amongst all of these tribes there were capitalists, even amongst the anti-capitalists. But capitalism had and has no respect for culture, and so we see no reason to call it a **tribe**. Instead it might be labeled a madness, a force of nature, or a religion all to itself.

In those freer decades, it was the **Folkists** in particular, whose finger seemed the most attuned to the pulse of the teeming ghettos. As each tribe went out to proselytize and recruit, they each began to admit there were some common themes amongst the Yiddish neighborhoods.

“We deserve to speak our tongue. But even if the teachers accept our children into a school, they beat them when they hear Yiddish.”

“We deserve civil rights, we deserve security, yet we are beset by pogroms and robberies, often with help from the police themselves.”

“We wish to vote, yet we have no one to vote for. We have no way to vote for ourselves.”

These simple complaints, pointed to a deeper general angst that the Folkists had predicted. And so, their analysis was adopted, or at least parts of it. Though the others saw such values as the first step

towards their differing utopias, they all recognized the broad truths in the Folkists' message. They all desired to be free Yids, allowed to bicker amongst themselves about what freedom really meant.

In the decades that followed the Folkists faded as a political force. They emigrated, or joined the other groups. In the end most fell beside the rest on forest marches and in the camps. But even as they fell, they had seen their own definition of the *Pintele Yid*, the *Jewish Spark*, thriving.

First in the cultural juggernaut that poured into the universities, factories and unions of the gentiles, jabbering away in Yiddish. Though they might have called themselves *Bundist*, *Maccabist*, *Liberal*, they spoke the tongue and carved each day a little more of the **Yiddish space**. This was the era of competing sports clubs, feminist lectures, celebrity revolutionaries, heroes and writers. We owe much that we have today to this brief explosion of joy and hope.

Second, in the partisan hideouts and doomed friendships of the death camps. At the edge of oblivion, the rivalries were forgotten. Frum and Fray alike spoke to each other in the secret tongue and died together. We owe much to this time of hopelessness as well. To this day, how many amongst us carry a name that was passed from the lips of the dying to the lips of the living, so their soul might be remembered from beneath the heaps of ash?

Finally, in the aftermath. When no sane Yid would argue for any alternative but **freedom together, now and wherever** it could be **seized**. Even then, if the utopia was not to be in the north, they still followed the spark. It burned amongst the waves of migrants and refugees who flowed south. Desperate, violent, raving with grief and fury and hope. The spark was there still, but increasingly it was twisted.



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It was in the hands of the **Zionsts** that this spark landed. Largely thanks to timing, and geopolitics. For the fragments of each tribe that endured the Burning, there was only one place and one voice that felt salient. **They had survived the destruction of a third temple they had not even known they possessed.** So they decided to return to the ruins of the old one. From the ashes of **five**, they were now **one**.

⁵ Czarny Sztandar (The Black Banner). Szymon Hirszenberg, 1907 The Jewish Museum, New York. Photograph by John Parnell. (Gift of the Estate of Rose Mintz, JM 63–67. The Jewish Museum, New York / Art Resource, NY)

This new tribe turned, and walked back along the old roads, back to the desert. As they went, they began to find the other Yids. Different Yids. Mughrabi Yids, Spanish Yids, Yemeni Yids, Indian Yids, Persian Yids, Kurdish Yids, Ethiopian Yids. Palestinian Yids. There were not four tribes, not five, but ten, twenty, thirty. The rest of the *People*, living their lives, enduring their own pogroms, their own renaissances and power struggles, speaking their own languages. Certainly not unscathed per-say, but not savaged. The racism that had made these others an afterthought was ignored by the fleeing Northerners. *"By choice or force"* they figured, *"we must save our foreign cousins from the horrors we have lived."* And so through aid, friendship, bribery, threat and altruism, they gathered them as they found them. Together, they went up to the hills and valleys of the Old Place and re-joined the long war.

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And what of we, who remained scattered?

For we who stayed or chose to wander further, what happened next remains a source of terrible pain, and terrible pride. In each generation since, we are wrenched asunder by what our kin chose to do. Across a thousand different cities, we too find ourselves changed. For though many of us escaped, or were spared, we too lost something. In America, or amongst the Soviets, or the depopulated Maghreb, on the empty castle walls of Gondar that Jewish hands built, on the cold steppes and mountains. We lost the ghettos, the factories, the farms, the vulgar tongues. We saw our towns evicted or abandoned, we chose white neighborhoods over old neighborhoods.

Through the stern pockets that survived amongst the Frum, we catch a distorted glimpse of what there was. In moments when many of us gather, in times of strife or sadness or joy, we see the spark still, the *Pintele Yid*. But it glows dimmer, it flickers beneath the weight of assimilation and capitalism and time and loss. Desperate to feel it again, we acquiesce to the missionary trips. We kiss the Kotel and wander enviously through the gleaming coastal cities, the barbed wire just beyond our sight. We fund their worst excesses, we relax in their home in a way we never knew we needed. We embrace, fuck, fight and are separated again.

Always, we are coming home, always we are leaving.



⁶ Bark Kokhba Stamp Joyous Festivals 5722 stamp - 0.40 Israeli lira - Heroes of Israel: Bar Kokhba August 21, 1961, Public Domain

Now we are two. Judea and Babylon. Forever jealous siblings, forever longing. We are bound by the old tongue and the weight of the dead, who we both carry on our shoulders. All of the ones we lost sit on our backs, leering and daring us to choose one path or the other lest we be led to ruin. To abandon our light-footed dance through the foreign lands is too heavy a price for we who remain. The blood spilt to stay and rule is a small price for them. They are content to play the role of brute for greater kingdoms, if it means they can keep their fief. And so they call themselves *Israel*.

We who choose **Babylon** must ask ourselves what we offer for them to relent from their ways? Dark days are upon us once again. An age of plague and famine and drought and flood the likes of which we have never seen. Any fool can see its shadow spreading. How many of these cataclysms have we survived now, both in the old land and outside it? These new Judeans seem set on weathering this one in their castle. Their spears point out towards any other who might seek to weather it beside them, or displace them once again. Where will we weather it? Will we find our own way together, in the wilds as we have done in the past? Or wander back, one by one, bloodied and grateful to help them man the walls?



⁷ Dybbuk Ephraim Moses Lilien (1874–1925) - Book of Job, appearing in Die Bucher Der Bibel, Public Domain

To live as Frayfolk

We are hanging to the edge as the floor falls away. At night we look back on our childhoods and the childhoods of our parents. We can see now what the last seventy years was: an extraordinary period of rest, experimentation and opportunity. We can also see that this extraordinary period was available only to some of us, under strict conditions of assimilation to the dominant society.

We should celebrate what we achieved. The survival and unification of countless Jewish communities who might otherwise have been annihilated by the violent anti-semitism of the 20th century. The reestablishment of a common language and culture. The birth of children who re-connected the separated lineages in family and blood. Integration into some of the wealthiest and most powerful empires on earth.

Yet we should also mourn what we have given up in the process. We have lost the distinct cultures of our grandparents in favor of a rigid American, European or Israeli national identity. Our secular civil societies have degraded under the weight of modern consumerism, or been drained by aliyah. The self-defense organizations, equitable labor organizations and community-run businesses that allowed us to uplift and protect ourselves are relics of the past. This soft power was surrendered for the promise of model minority status and the benevolent protection of law enforcement and career politicians. In the west in particular, we have experienced a collective abandoning of many communal spaces. The otherness was surrendered gladly for a dream of white collar professionalism and suburban assimilation.

In the winter of 5784, as we began this piece, Four hard truths felt urgent for us to name. They are as simple as they are difficult to swallow.

- **Firstly,** that the greater Diaspora is in crisis. Despite the spread of influencers and well funded non profits, its deeper social fabric is worn thin. It is weakened by assimilation to both left-wing and right-wing Christian cultural norms, and led by anemic institutions. How can we expect to face a new century that will be defined by famine, flood, migration and storms? This is a reality that can no longer be looked at through the rose colored glasses of progressive activism, or the childish blinders of right-wing denial.
- **Secondly,** that our cousins' long war will continue, towards a bloody victory or catastrophic re-exile. Either circumstance is a distinct possibility at this moment. A single mistake, or even the metastasizing of the current barbarity, will spark a larger and unwinnable war. Under either circumstance, it will continue to accelerate an isolation of Jews across the Diaspora and Israel that is unprecedented in the last 70 years.
- **Thirdly,** That the Diaspora can only survive if it is reimagined and restrengthened. This must happen for several reasons. For its own longevity and vitality, to ward off a swallowing by western assimilation. For a communal defense in the face of resurgent violence and the unfolding environmental catastrophe. And as a source of refuge, should re-exile occur. This can be achieved through a revitalization and merging of historical and modern social infrastructure. In particular the construction of new Jewish civil societies, social clubs, and self-defense networks that neither condemn Israelis, nor allow themselves to be blinded by absolute loyalty to their narrow claim to leadership.

- **Fourthly**, that these organizations must be defined by simple, broad, shared values or they will be doomed to collapse. These values must strive to leave behind the culture wars, and the historical pitfalls that lead to fragmentation. The way forward lies in shared commitments to Jewish solidarity, self defense and absolute equality in how we work together. Beyond that, we pass no judgment on what forms such organizations ultimately take. There should be a thousand methods, not one. There should be a thousand leaders, not a few.



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The seriousness of the moment needs no more explanation than that. Any Yid who reads this understands in their soul the gravity of what is upon us now. But what are these new structures to be? We aren't suggesting opening a kitschy deli or all moving into the same subdivision. Small businesses won't save us, suburbanism won't save us. *This commodified reality won't save us.* The changes must be more larval, more drastic and more uncomfortable.

As a start, we suggest a Minyan. Not an NGO or a political party, but a simple minyan of ten Jews. A minyan is an old and critical tool for those in the Diaspora in particular. It has evolved, from a space strictly for male prayer and ritual, to a broader measure of the minimum number of Jews needed to establish a community. It does not matter what the gender or religiosity of the participants is, it matters whether there are ten Jews who are willing to meet each other. These connections can be made on social media or messaging apps like Telegram or Whatsapp. But people should strive to take them into the real world quickly and avoid a culture of digital socialization. The

⁸Participants in a carpentry training course for Jews, Częstochowa, Poland, 1946. The banner at top reads in Hebrew: "Labor is Our Life." In the center of the round disk on the floor is the Hebrew motto: "The people of Israel lives." Photograph by L. Kuzmir. (YIVO)

isolating sickness of group chats and online social activity is something we have all felt. In person connections are an art we all have to relearn.

Equitable space. This is not an orthodox book. The secular community at large has not acquiesced to orthodox standards, and has no plans to. That does not preclude the option for *voluntary* separation at certain times, nor does it mandate the exclusion of religious Jews. Anyone who advocates against voluntary separation or the exclusion of religious people is being divisive, short sighted and prejudiced.

Mutually agreed upon separation, be it along gender, or age or race or sexuality, can be healthy for discussion, conflict resolution or privacy. This has been expanded on as a strategy among Kurdish groups in Northern Syria as a compromise between radically equitable and radically religious groups. Women (and those who were socialized as Women) hold their own separate consuls on topics that they consider non-negotiable. These include matters of domestic violence, child rearing, women's health and education. At the same time men hold their own spaces to discuss similar topics, as well as examine their own relationships with women.

The points at which such separation becomes harmful is when it is coerced, or when it gives way to exclusivity. Separation should have a purpose, a start time and an end time, and it should never involve the formation of exclusive groups that continue beyond that. At all other times, space should be shared, as should decision making. This can also allow for more orthodox people to participate where they feel comfortable, and take space where they do not. Neither scenario will result in them being excluded from activities. We should all do our best to walk back from culturally Christian attitudes towards work, sex and shared space, and push through our learned discomforts. No Yid should feel that their values are so fragile as to be shattered by a friendship with someone who is more or less religious.

Gathering in the outdoors, or in communal spaces. This seems simple, especially to anyone who spent their childhoods at summer camps. But it is insidiously absent in so many of our lives, both socially and religiously. When was the last time you celebrated a seder outdoors? Or in a park or a community center? When was the last time you hiked not by yourself or with one friend, but with nine? What's the longest you've gone in the countryside without your phone?

Undoubtedly, our alienation owes a great deal to our atomization. In the era of the suburb, of the unending road, who will answer a simple call to go out into creation? To gather in the neglected or wild places together? The Baal Shem Tov famously wandered out into the forest to bless the forgotten streams and brooks that his contemporaries ignored as they locked themselves inside the Shul. The Socialists and the Zionists saw the health of the youth and the community as a whole as inherently tied to their time spent in the natural world. The era of the Borscht Belt and the Catskills was defined by a uniquely Jewish commitment to take a long break from work together to live for a time in the country. The ritual of grounding ourselves and our communities in a sustainable and natural setting is arguably our greatest loss in the modern era. If we take no lessons back from our grandparents, we can at least take this.

A calculated and rational approach to self defense. We have expanded on this topic later in this book. Suffice to say, the inadequacy of both progressive and right-wing perspectives on this

topic is massive and arguably existential. Self-defense must be rational, devastating, and collective. Each of us has an obligation to learn to be armed, to treat injuries and to train our bodies or our minds to the best of our abilities. We include several more minor principles that ought to be considered:

1. **An enlightened commitment to protect and nurture Judaism** and all of its affiliated languages and cultures as our ancestral traditions. A dedication to Tikkun Olam that seeks lasting peace through shared experiences between Jews and non Jews.
2. **Rejection of predatory schemes, Christian moralism and academic parasites.** The end goal is not a business, it is not a non-profit, it is not a book, it is not a brand. Do not mistake tools for purpose. Means inform the end goal and should be thought of as simultaneous actions.
3. **Good faith engagement with all** who wish to work in coalition. Collective resolution of conflict. A focus on dialogue and education to foster the building of a large, vibrant, pluralist Jewish community inclusive to all sects. **We believe in the Pintele Yid.**
4. **Celebrations and broader community events** centered around the Jewish calendar at the weekly, monthly and yearly level. These events do not have to be religious in nature, even if their origin is religious or if some choose to observe them religiously. The purpose is for Jewish celebration on a Jewish schedule.

We have expanded our thoughts on these themes in longer sections below. We hope to provide sketches of a map for the coming decades, but we can not provide the map itself. A reckoning with so many elements of our identities is at hand, and the only way to endure it is to engage with each other.

American and Western Jews must navigate their own semi-assimilation into societies that still harbor a great deal of antisemitism, as well as their participation in racist systems that have alienated many other minorities groups from any sympathy for them. Israeli Jews must address the untenable nature of their status quo, as well as the corruption of their leadership and the hyper-violence that has become normalized in their culture. Secular and Orthodox Jews everywhere must engage in a detente, and the decisions that emerge from that rapprochement must be led by and made by both Orthodox and secular women.

All of us must walk away from the broader culture wars. Ultimately, they are not for us, and have never been for us. We are mascots to the competing Christian powers, and any substance that underlined those debates has long become subsumed by the power struggle between two flavors of Christian hegemony.

All of us face isolation, all of us have committed offenses and had offenses committed against us. Little of it matters in the face of the broader threat, the great turmoil that is beginning. What good is it fighting over a dried sea? What use are Chabad houses in a flooded city? What are we building now to survive?

Once upon a time, our own experiences underlaid the seeds of enlightenment. It was the familial memory of the Inquisition, as well as her own status as a Crypto-Jew that led Spinoza's Grandmother

to educate him with the nuance that she did. This in turn set him on his path to biblical criticism, rationalism and a view of the natural world that would influence everything all the way to Darwin. Nevermind that he was subjected to wholesale excommunication by both his fellow Jews and the broader Dutch community during his lifetime.

It was a life of hard manual labor and poverty, coupled with the joyless and hierarchical misery of Shul life that led the Baal Shem Tov to advocate ecstatic and communal religiosity. Nevermind that his most radical ideas were often downplayed as his descendents fought to establish new dynasties and control. These moments happen both slowly, and all at once. **We seek a new Haskalah, as well as a new Halakhah.** Without both, it seems impossible that we will survive the weight of the days ahead.



⁹ Tearoom of a Po'ale Tsiyon home for workers in the Praga suburb, Warsaw, ca. 1920s. On the wall are portraits of Karl Marx and Ber Borokhov. (YIVO)

Shortening the Path between the Rising Seas



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¹⁰ Marc Chagall, Moses and The Sea

Nisan. We began writing this book in the dead of winter. Now we are in the first days of Nisan, and Pesach has come. When we gather, we will tell each other the story of exodus as if it had happened to our own parents. No matter when or where we are, we are obligated to maintain the memory as immediate and visceral. An event whose witness has just passed away a few years ago, whose face everyone still remembers. We experience the bondage, the escape, and the journey as something that is still unfolding.

The uniqueness of this practice is difficult to overstate. One can extrapolate an entire perspective on time and space from this ritual. It is not even an act of ancestor worship or veneration, it is an act of cultural time travel. Every step has been practiced a thousand times, even as we are encouraged to reimagine and retell it anew. As children, we are both participants and subjects. As adults, we open the door for the prophet Elijah and leave out a glass of wine. We understand that the doorway will remain empty and the wine full. Yet each of us feels the tingling on our neck when the door is opened. Each of us smells the outside air and knows something has stepped sideways through time across our doorstep.

It is said that every Jew who has ever lived or will ever live was present at Sinai to witness Moses speak with God. A shared cultural womb. Through the story of Exodus and Sinai we are confronted with our origins on several levels. We witness God fold itself down from a creature of storm clouds, split seas and fire into a series of written words which we carry with us. We witness our transition from “Israelites” to the “people of Israel.” And we are given a threshold to mark the step from myth to archaeological record. Such casual flirtation with dimensional and chronological order is a survival mechanism. A relic from the days when our religious traditions were more oral than literary, a backup, should the parchment be burned again. But the ability to step backwards, begs another question. **Can we step forwards?**

In his science fiction series, Frank Herbert coined the term *Kwisatz Haderach* to describe a human crafted Messiah who can see multiple futures. They use this ability to anticipate humanity’s oncoming brush with extinction, and chart a path that will allow them to survive the hardship over a shorter and less terrible duration. In the book the title is also defined as **“the shortening of the way.”**

This concept is most certainly taken from the talmudic concept of the *Kefitzat Haderech*, a miraculously shortened path, or in later Hasidic interpretations, a portal through which masters of Kabbalah leapt across time and space. This idea appears both literally and figuratively in literature and myth. Through these stories, the sages attempted to justify inconsistencies in the Torah, or rumors of people crossing great distances, or similar figures appearing in multiple places at once. They sought to shrink the fear of the hostile space that stretched between the little pockets of Jews. They sought to keep the tribes connected, if not physically, than in their imaginations.

When we peer forwards into time from our present moment, we do so with few certainties. We perceive no shortening of the road, we can hardly see around the next curve. Yet we can still make decisions now that will allow those who come after to reach back towards us. While we can predict little of oncoming wars or specific events, we can still know a great deal about the age that we are entering. We can wade into the charts depicting floods, fires and drought with both eyes open. We can say **“The town where I live will flood every year by the time I am fifty.” “A season will**

come soon when produce will not grow on the plains of California.” And we can prepare our children now for that inevitability. Not by something so asinine as recycling or civic service. Not by the hoarding of supplies or the joining of social movements defined by evangelization for its own sake. We can look at it like Jews. We prepare for an apocalypse that will span a hundred generations with the tools and lessons of the ones we have already endured.

- The old story taught us to tell ourselves of an origin, whether or not it was true.
- Babylon taught us to maintain and record our identity, even in exile.
- The scattering across the ruins of Rome taught us to keep in touch. To travel and bicker even as our tongues and our skins changed and the roads became treacherous or abandoned.
- The pestilence and insanity of Medieval Europe taught us to value our literacy and cleanliness.
- The benevolence of Muslim rule taught us that we could believe in an equitable, diverse society.
- The barbarism of the Inquisition taught us to plan our escapes, and to embrace and nurture the emerging enlightenment.
- The bondage of the Pale of Settlement taught us the power of communalism in agriculture and in industry.
- America taught us wealth, and what it meant to be accepted amongst the privileged.
- The mounds of ash and the grinning skull showed us the totality of annihilation, the silence of it, the tangibility.
- The rise of Arab nationalism and the flight from those lands, taught us that Israel would not be a European novelty, but the seed of a remingled people, with no homes to return to.
- The triumph and escape of Beta Israel showed that our memories could drift between oral and written life and survive, and that Jewish solidarity could be stronger than Western racism.
- The flight of the Russians taught us that forced assimilation could be undone.
- The short-sighted brutishness of modern Israel taught us that a nation-state is as much a corner to be caught in, as it is a fortress to escape into. And that petty xenophobia is a disease anyone can catch.

Our responsibility in the here and now is to take all of these previous lessons and shift our lives with them in mind. Regions with more water or stable crop conditions will become more valuable. Regions destined to experience regular catastrophe will be regions many people flee. There will be violence, there will be extremism, there will be ***displacement everywhere***.

This will occur coercively. We will witness an organized movement of wealthy, voluntary refugees who wield the political and financial power to seize land. They will be preceded and followed by the desperate who will come with no support at all. The settlement movement in Israel already carries undertones of these dynamics. That is no great revelation to say that. But it is not some unique evil of Zionists or Jews to make war in this way. It is not an exception, if anything it is depressingly normal, and it will continue to escalate in a thousand different places around the world.



11

We should prepare our communities to flee quickly together. A network of supplies and housing and vehicles for enduring catastrophe, be it from violence or weather. Likewise, we should be prepared as a community to receive others, be they Jews or non-Jews. We should establish a practice of amateur meteorology and ecology. It does not take a degree to learn about these patterns or research the conditions of one's region. It should be seen as *Jewish* to know and track the local flood patterns or rainfall. To count birds or insects each year. It should be something children do.

Through such actions, we participate in a **tactile *Tiqqun Olam*** as a bulwark against despair. Our communities should put energy into citizen climate science projects, and practical construction. Naturalist programs, local reforestation, alternative water filtration or power supplies, the testing and rebuilding of soil, local food production. This instead of becoming embroiled in non-profits, political movements or performative nothingness. How much of our alienation now is from our surroundings as much as from our neighbors? How much religious energy is wasted on the mediocre, the mundane, when the opportunity to merge it with an ecstatic experience of the earth is at our fingertips? We must raise a generation that is tied with the natural land they live on on a religious level and strive to shift our lives to that reality now.

For all of the repugnance of the settler movement in the West Bank, it is driven by a vanguard of disillusioned Orthodox youth. Many of these teenagers are runaways. They have chosen a life of violence, religious pastoralism, sexual freedom and communalism. The great tragedy is that they have chosen it at the expense of the lives of their neighbors, and at the behest of powerful and

¹¹ Jewish agricultural workers eating breakfast at an agricultural settlement in Kherson, Ukraine, ca. 1925. (YIVO)

predatory racists. The youth push ever further out into the countryside, as each space they occupy is then handed over to be paved and transformed into the very thing they first fled. Their personal motivations are multifaceted, they retain agency for their crimes, including arson and murder. But the fact remains that the bleakness of contemporary yeshiva Orthodoxy is a major driver for the flight of the youth to the mountains and the hills. That lesson should ring true across the Diaspora, as well as within Israel. And it would do the entire Jewish community good to sit with the questions of why our religion is so steeped in agricultural and herding holidays. And what we are doing, locked inside, pouring over old descriptions of the tending of the land, instead of going out to tend it.

No single government or political movement today is honest about what is happening. Few show any signs of becoming so in the near future. This is not a performative political ideology that will shake the rest of the world into sudden action. Rather, **It is a question of becoming the first generation to accept that the catastrophe is already here, and begin charting a path through it.** We will be largely alone, at least at first. Political movements on multiple sides will paint us as agitators, troublemakers, or ethno-nationalists turning inwards. But our survival is our own responsibility, as is the survival of anyone who wishes to join us. We must not make it something to be debated on television, but an example to be set. **The coming centuries of flood and fire will be survived.**



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¹² Women walking past the ruins of the Great Synagogue on the way to the marketplace, Satanov, Ukraine, 2000. Photograph by Andrzej Polec. © Andrzej Polec, www.shtetl.info

The Electric Levithan



13

To write about the effects that the devices are having on us feels daunting, or cliché. There are psychological studies, documentaries, there are books and lectures. What is the point of re-summarizing the dread we feel when we misplace our phones? Or the euphoria we feel at the sight of a floating notification? It feels utterly asinine.

Instead perhaps it is worth exploring the manufacturers behind the devices? Or the software that sustains them? **Here too, we find a topic saturated.** Either with utopian hopes for a connected society, or a crushing paranoia at its sheer horror. People advocate regulation, or a priestly hierarchy, or unrealistic rejection. People scream their distrust for the forces that package and deliver the media they consume, and then breathlessly share it as if it were a long hidden truth. The conclusions are bleak, the revelations shallow.

A third question then: What does this way of life do to our soul? It is a fact that we must engage with these applications and services to some degree. But it is a choice to do it to the extent that most of us do. What would it look like not to reject “technology” in some misguided reactionary gesture, but rather the concept of the pocket eye, the personalized avatar? Our collective surrender of such a psychologically powerful part of our identity is horrific, but it is also pathetic. That we give so much of ourselves to a competing pack of fools who have no plan beyond growth and resale of our bodies, our minds, our fears, our routines, is sad. It is not about the morality of technology, it is not even about big brother, **it is about rejecting a worship of nothing.** It is about rejecting the sacrifice of our short, fleeting lives to a false God.

So let’s call social media and all of its affiliated data mining endeavors what it is, **Avodah Zarah, the worship of a foreign idol.** When looked at through this lens, we see the features of social media and tech addiction in general as a **frantic worship of a dead and soulless thing.** The development of large language models inaccurately described as “Artificial Intelligence” has helped to lay this truth bare. On Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram and TikTok we see a race to the bottom, with the idea of any engagement being good engagement taken to its logical conclusion:

¹³ Leviathan (1983). Painting by Michael Sagan-Cohen, collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem

bots talking to bots. A rapidly destabilizing network of formless advertising and incoherence. After a long break, the vileness of looking at it all is overwhelming.

An Israeli telegram channel dedicated entirely to images of dead Palestinians interspersed with advertisements for crypto-currency and gambling.

A Palestinian Instagram layering AI generated images of starving children, mutilated bodies, and conspiracies about “zionist” control of world banking, posting dozens and dozens of times per a day for months.

On Facebook, lonely elders chat back and forth with the zombified spam profiles of the deceased. They admire obviously artificial images, too abandoned by the rest of us to even understand what they’re seeing.

On Youtube, children so young they can not even yet speak click through thumbnails of distorted gawking adults, as the pages try to convince toddlers to like and subscribe.

To address the collective madness we have to address the alienation that drives it in the first place. We have already discussed some simple suggestions for collective activities that could be taken earlier in this book. In regards to continuing to engage with social media, which nevertheless remains a potent source of cultural literacy, we must be able to approach it with **strict utilitarianism**. It is a dangerous, monitored and limited tool, nothing more. It is not a way to organize a revolution or educate or connect or raise awareness or find meaning. This is one of the most difficult things for most people to grasp. Many of us grew up on the myth of the Facebook revolution, the punk developer. But so little of that was ever true. These platforms have always been designed to extract, spy and weaponize our social interactions. The mental and spiritual poisons that they spread are every bit as potent as the physical poisons spread by any other massive industrial complex.

The question of what can act as a healthy replacement for social media lends itself to the deeper question that persists throughout this book: *“How will we live?”* There are little steps that can be taken. We can turn off our phones on Shabbat. This does not then necessitate finishing our cooking by sundown and lighting candles. We can turn off our phones and go about the rest of our Friday with no other heed paid to the evening, confident in the fact that we have taken a drastic and ritualistic step to lay aside the digital weight and workload of the rest of the week.

We can leave social media and still stay in touch. We can own dumb phones, we can make tangible efforts to drop in unannounced and encourage others to do the same to us. But fundamentally above all else we have to develop a cultural aversion to social media, phone addiction and big tech worship in general. It has to be taught from a young age and viewed within ourselves and our peers as akin to nicotine or alcoholism. Pervasive, extremely difficult to extricate ourselves from completely, but a recognizable sickness to both the body and soul. And key to that recognition is building shared habits, shared support and shared alternatives.

Which brings us back to a Shabbat without phones. To go from sunset to sunset without a phone is a small step, but how many of us have done it? And how many of us want to do it alone? This is the place to start. Don’t spend the evening or the following day shut inside self-consciously playing the religious figure. Make plans with friends ahead of time. Set a meeting place and a time and find your way there without your devices. Spend as much of the day together as you can. Find support in one another in the awkwardness of being without a map, or the varied levels of anxiety some may hold

about missing important messages or emergencies. Let loved ones know when you'll be back, or don't.

When people are leaving addiction behind, the positive support of others who understand what they are going through is everything. Despite the portrayals on TV of AA meetings and grim chain smokers, the reality of quitting addiction together is often giddy and fun. One feels like a young teenager again, relearning how to curb boredom. In this new puberty, we are forced to develop new interests and focus and creativity. But the key is that it must be done together. No one envies the newly sober individual who sits alone at home on a Friday night. This path, once again, must be charted together and with intentionality.

The little experiments we make today can live on well beyond our lifetimes. There is a great yearning in this moment, across many cultures and age groups, for an escape from the way of the phone. There is a fear amongst the teenagers who know that they know nothing else and have no one to show them how to go without. There is fear for the children who are exhibiting slower periods of speech development. There is a shame that our parents have no one to talk to anymore but a disguised reflection. **This is an existential angst, any examples set now will be noticed by everyone.** Whatever rituals we develop ought to be informed by the experiences of our ancestors long dead, and performed for the sake of those who are to come long after.



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¹⁴ Girls dancing at the ceremony of bringing the firstborn in 1951 at Kibbutz Givat Haim Mouched Photographer: Otto Gil, public domain

Surviving Violence



15

What can be said about violence? We, the authors, have personally each lived through an attempt on our lives by Nazis. We have kin in Pittsburgh, in Charlottesville, we have bones in Jaffa, and ashes frozen in the Pale. We have empty spaces for names we have forgotten, we have final letters, we remember. It is difficult to write in a satisfying way about violence. Ultimately, so much of the experience of violence in the Diaspora is defined by an acute sense of *isolation* and *vulnerability*, both as individuals and as a community.

“The video footage of Nazis marching through the University of Virginia campus carrying torches would become fodder for political campaigns, while the slogans calling for the genocide of Jews felt like an after thought for the media and activists. We know that every Nazi slogan also targets every marginalized group, but it seemed that those same groups forgot it began with antisemitism.”-Charlottesville

¹⁵Demonstrators outside Madison Square Garden seize a uniformed member of the German American Bund who emerged from the rally, February 20, 1939. (AP Photo, File)

"I regret that I wasn't armed. I'd been told to leave my gun at home. It probably wouldn't have mattered, I probably would have hurt someone. But I regret it. All morning I dodged the rocks, when I felt brave I would hit them with my fists or my boots. But when I was flung through the air by the car, and when I jumped up and ran after it as it reversed up the street, I was thinking, 'Why did I listen to them? I knew I knew I knew.'" Even though I was there with friends, I felt like I fought alone. As a Jew I mean. The coalition was beautiful, people were hurt and Heather gave her life, I would never take away from that. But before and during and after, I wanted to be there with other Jews in a more organized way. Ultimately, many of us were there as part of other groups, we weren't there together."**-Charlottesville**

It should not be controversial to say that as Jews in the diaspora, we often fight alone. We do not always have our own banners, or songs, or chants. In conflicts against the far-right, we are usually expected to participate as an assimilated faction of the "allies." In this new conflict revolving around the war, we are asked to choose between the worst excesses of our cousins' nationalism, or a mob infiltrated with dozens of flavors of our enemies.



¹⁶ Mourners with the body of a Jew killed in a pogrom, Odessa, 1905. (YIVO)

On the subject of violence, isolation and self-defense we identify four more key problems:

1. **We have ceded our safety** to police and private mercenaries. This, despite the fact that many of them have been shown to be sympathetic to antisemitic paramilitary movements. Our spaces are not always guarded by people who are personally motivated to protect them. Many of us also take part in liberal activism against the concept of “gun violence,” yet most “gun violence” laws revolve around mass surveillance, entrapment, and punishment of common people rather than addressing mental health or right-wing deradicalization. These laws have consistently been used to target minority groups looking to defend themselves as opposed to being applied to the right-wing groups who murder them.
2. **If we look for self-defense courses for our community**, they are exhibition classes run by self-described experts. Often they are taught by hucksters, who travel from tragedy to tragedy and prey on people’s trauma and fear. A six week course may offer some rudimentary training, but they result in an increased sense of helplessness, or a false sense of security. They do little to promote habitual training in practical martial arts, strategic thinking about self-defense, or the building of relationships with neighbors that actually raise collective security.
3. **If we seek to learn to fight with a gun**, we are sent to an NRA affiliated course that teaches us to cower in our house with a pistol and a flashlight. We are taught to fear robberies and home invasions, and to always buy more. We are sold the gun as an **identity** and a **brand**, and we are encouraged to be consumed by it. American gun culture sells a fear of a childish, fictional boogeyman. Our enemies are real and terrifying. To fight well is to learn to fight together, understand tactical risks as a community, and learn logistical strategies.
4. **We lack agency within our communal spaces to develop independent, practical self-defense**. We are expected to pledge allegiance to the Jewish Federation, or the JCC, or pick a side in the Byzantine intrigues between local Rabbis. Threat assessments are made by these organizations on our behalf, often based on overblown fears, self-interest, or the advice of companies that have no accountability to us. It is considered risky for the broader Jewish community to lead these conversations, or uncouth. We are surrounded by wolves while our communal wealth and influence are clumsily wielded on behalf of the war, or on behalf of this week’s politician, on behalf of our “leadership.”

We have composed a checklist to engage more effectively and equitably with violence and self-defense. Once again, we propose that Minyans are the ideal size, and that social media should be avoided and used as a secondary option to real world gathering. Additionally, we underline the importance of strict inclusivity for all Jews, and gender parity. All of these topics are prone to male exclusivity. In order to create an equitable fighting and healing culture, we must commit to equity in all spheres of self-defense. Similarly, we must recognize that not everyone will engage with athletic or aggressive activities. Equal respect should be given to logistical, research based, communal, and physical self defense development. All of these methods must work in tandem, not competitively or hierarchically.

- ☐ **A holistic fighting culture centered around practical martial arts.** Practical martial arts are currently dominated by Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and wrestling for

grappling and Muay Thai and boxing for striking. These fighting methods have been tested to a degree in tournaments and street fights that outclasses everything else. Krav-maga as it exists in the US, as well as other self-defense courses that do not allow sparing should be dispensed with or engaged with on a limited basis. Evidence and trainability should be the gold standard.

- ☐ **Active, multipurpose practice spaces.** Fighting is something that must be practiced, like any art or sport, or it falls off. It should be enjoyable, healthy and fun. It should also not be taught through cruelty or chauvinism. A good gym is kind, welcoming, clean, and communal. The goal is to learn and refine, not hurt each other. There should also be a place to eat, a place for children to play, a place to get clean afterwards.
- ☐ **An examination of group fighting as it exists in Eastern Europe.** We do not advocate embracing the fascism or misogyny of many of these groups, nor their nihilism. But we believe that the unique type of anti-communal violence we face can not be fought with individualist training. It must be met with a familiarity in group fighting that is unlike anything that currently exists in the US. This is not a common practice among Americans for a multitude of reasons, and it could serve as a major asset to any group of Jews who have learned to fight collectively with discipline and love for one another.
- ☐ **A communal attitude towards armed self-defense.** American firearms culture valorizes a paranoid individuality. We say weapons are tools and each tool should be used for its appropriate purpose, whether that be for farming, hunting, or self defense. We should look to those who have experience to put it to good use, and teach others how to defend themselves comprehensively.
- ☐ **Teaching of traumatic injury care in concert with self-defense.** Gun violence towards Jews is often an attack on our communal spaces, our groceries, our Shuls, our holiday gatherings. It is often marked by many casualties, and by a well armed attacker or attackers. Trauma courses that address rapid intervention in tandem with an armed response exist. Courses like Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC/TCCC) as well as certifications in things like **Wilderness First Responder** courses should be invested in by the community at large. The Hatzolah model used by Orthodox communities, which focuses on community EMS services could also be integrated and adapted to a secular setting in tandem with this type of traumatic injury education.
- ☐ **A fundamentally Jewish threat assessment.** Who amongst us keeps tabs on local Nazis? Not college anti-zionists or crackpots, but the quiet ones? Who can calm down enough from the online rhetoric to track? To follow? To think and assess critically as the hunters of Eichman or the Munich attackers did? Threat assessment can not be led by activists who lie, or activists who ignore or activists period. Both pro-Zionists who exaggerate the threat from progressive activists, and anti-Zionists who ignore their significant faults, are complicit. We must uplift level-headed, evidence based threat assessments and face the hard truths.



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¹⁷ Jewish partisans near Pinsk, Belorussia, U.S.S.R. (now Belarus), 1944. Encyclopedia Britannica.

Assimilation



Across the Diaspora and even within Israel, we find ourselves at a point of extreme **Assimilation**. This process is multifaceted. It takes on intertwining and insidious forms that do not have clear borders, but can still be broadly defined.

On the “left” assimilation is largely marked by a cleaving to the subcultural ideology of identity politics. Though many Jews have been involved in developing this ideology of critical analysis towards structural discrimination, its current state has morphed into something puritanical and dogmatic. The critique was originally designed to push back on the pressure to abide by dominant American conservative rules, and to point out the continued inequalities that existed under the surface of the “melting pot” narrative. It contained complex analysis of socio-political and socio-economic forces that impacted different communities with different intensities.

In the current era, it functions largely as a social ideology amongst well educated suburban to urban transplants. Increasingly it borrows rhetoric and soundbites from race based authoritarian communist and identitarian movements. It is also heavily marked by a system of **proselytization and denunciation**. Both of these dynamics have their roots in dominant American protestant culture, and are features of both left and right-wing movements within the United States. Moreso,

¹⁸ Postcard depicting a family on its way to a synagogue. The grandfather is bearded and traditionally dressed, while the next generation wears modern clothes and the man is beardless. (Publisher unknown, printed in Germany.)YIVO

the proliferation of crowd-funded NGOs has led to an economy of outrage. Progress is measured by the growth of financially motivated groups that perpetuate their own pyramid scheme through regular waves of denunciation of internal enemies followed by pleas for financial support.

This has also led to the narrative that **“Jews are white.”** While the majority of American Jews are white skinned, and have been allowed a great degree of access to “whiteness” **as it exists as a caste in the US**, they still remain “un-white” in many different scenarios. They also face violence from a myriad of racial-nationalist and extremist movements. This is evidenced by the mixed nature of shooting, stabbing and firebombing attacks against Jews across the US and Europe in the last decade by Black, White, Muslim and Latino extremists.

Jews both in America and in Israel retain complex ancestries that are often defined by interracial and intercultural marriage. **Israel, is if anything, the bastion of Jewish un-whiteness.** The society, while still deeply racist against non-Jews, has actively pushed for the intermarriage of Jews from around the world, and the formation of a new culture that is multi-ethnic and multi-racial. The discrimination against non-Jews in Israel is a form of reactionary violence adopted from the Jewish experience in the United States. Plenty of examples of cross cultural existence within the U.S. and Israel demonstrates a desire for Jews to live in complementary harmony with others. We must separate reactionary behavior adopted from assimilation from the true nature of Judaism that celebrates cultural pluralism.

On the American “right” we see an almost mirror image. Neo-conservative Jewish ideologies are varied, but have accelerated in the last thirty years. Many American Jews have become more suburban, and moved out of academic or skilled labor into white collar middle management. Broadly, the last generation experienced upward mobility and a wave of acceptance into modes of economic and political power. Racial tensions in cities in the 80s and 90s led to an uptick in pro-law and order sentiments and participation by Jews in a second wave of white flight.

The evangelical right has invested millions of dollars in a charm campaign towards Zionist organizations. On the surface this is to support Israel. In reality, evangelical Christians hope to achieve an apocalyptic narrative that will see all Jews cast into hell after the return of Christ as the messiah. They seek political power in Israel to establish a foothold for Christian domination at a later date. They also seek to steal cultural elements from modern Judaism in a perverse attempt to get closer to the “first Christians.” Practically, this serves to ***slowly normalize the idea that they are the rightful inheritors of Israel.*** This is most heavily evidenced by the explosion of Messianic “Jews” across the US. Right wing Jews ignore this, or minimize it at their own peril. Many Israelis believe they can control or work with the evangelical right. They fail to appreciate its ruthlessness, its scale, and its capacity for cultural erasure and murder.

These dynamics result in an assimilated culture that increasingly tolerates racism, antisemitism, misogyny and simplistic American tropes. In short, the Jews begin to resemble the evangelical neocons. Right down to their utter lack of fashion sense, or capacity for visual beauty, art or cultural depth.

All of this is to say nothing of the well documented overlap with explicit white nationalists amongst the American right wing. All right wing movements in the US exist in a close relationship to white nationalist conspiracy theories about shadowy and anti-Christian forces that control the government, education system and healthcare system. These conspiracies are well documented for their extensive antisemitism and their role in radicalizing people towards anti-Jewish belief systems. In addition, a willingness by right-wing Jews, particularly in the Diaspora, to lay down with these people starts a clock that ticks down to the moment they will come back around to lay their knives in us. This was once common knowledge for Jews, it is a sad state of affairs to see so many Jews who have forgotten this natural law. Be they Frum who vote only short-sightedly or comfy white collar types in the vein of Stephen Miller, who are happy to arm and enthrone more and more ethno-nationalists and Christian-supremacists for a paycheck, and a seat at the table.

It is our collective duty to confront both of these trends while not simply settling for a lazy, centrist conclusion. The third route is not the thinning liberalism of our parent's generation. It is not a reactionary orthodoxy. It is something new and sharp and uncompromising rooted in realities that extend beyond 24 hour news and social media politics. A coming together, a love for our history as well as our future, a recommitment to each other at the brink of unprecedented disaster and change. We will have to rediscover our own identity, by choice or by force. The first step to rediscovery lies in the shedding off of the costumes we have been dressed in.



¹⁹ "Religion is a hindrance to the Five-Year Plan." Yiddish poster. "Down with religious holidays! Religion is a weapon for enslaving the worker. Join the union of militant apikorsim [heretics]." Printed in Moscow, ca. 1928. Moldovan Family Collection

Play

The trope, which is at this point so cliché that it causes us all to groan, of the muscular Sabra and the feeble Diasporist is an old one. And one that has been cultivated by our enemies as well as ourselves. Somehow it continues to linger, despite all of the evidence to the contrary. Instead of engaging with it as a vehicle for the debate around Zionism and Diasporism, perhaps it is better to engage with it as a study of a collective feeling of isolation and helplessness.

Like many other topics we've written about, the trope of the feeble Jew is ultimately a reflection of a feeling of powerlessness. It is something that Zionism historically offered an enticing antithesis to. The rhetoric about a life outdoors working the land and eating well were generally hyperbole and propaganda. But what was offered in Israel, especially in the early days, was a life of shared activity, which in turn lent itself well to a culture of sport for sport's sake. The politically affiliated clubs that persist to this day, *Maccabi*, *Beitar*, *Hapoel*, represent competing political philosophies on how that collective life should be organized, philosophies that played out on the sports field. But we can trace their roots further back, to the Jewish sporting clubs in pre-war Europe. *Maccabi*, who might be described as center right Zionists, *Beitar* the far-right, and *Hapoel*, the labor Zionists. They exist today in absence of their fourth sibling, *Morgenshtern*, the sporting club of the Bundists.



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This group, also massively popular, experimented with ways to make sports more inclusive from a gender standpoint as well as an athletic standpoint. So where the other clubs were often male-centric and focused on individualist sports like boxing, *Morgenshtern* attempted to shift focus to the act of collective play and activity. In some ways this was antiquated and misguided (*ex. their attempt to rewrite soccer to have no winner or loser, and their opposition to club boxing*). But in other ways we can look back and see the underlying thought process. They saw sport as a measure of the pulse of

²⁰ "Soccer match: Maccabi Baranowicz against Ha-Koah Pinsk." Yiddish poster. Printed by Glouberman, Pinsk, Poland (now in Belarus). YIVO

the Jewish community at a time of extreme uncertainty and segregation. They hoped to build self-confidence and self-love that would extend to the people who were often left out of such activities. Women, people with physical disabilities or jobs that made them unable to attend regular practice, older people whose bodies were damaged by years of hard labor. The ideology that sport should extend beyond just competition to function as an act of collective wellness and community building is something to be appreciated, even if their methods were at times silly.

Morgenshtern was decimated by a combination of factors in the middle of the 20th century. The Holocaust, their own fanatical opposition to anything associated with Zionism, political and cultural assimilation by the Soviet Union and the United States. They faded so fast it might be described as falling.

The Bund is often used by leftists as an oversimplified beacon of anti-Zionism, or by Zionists as an example of the folly of Diasporism. The reality is far more complex. Many Jews with Ashkenazi ancestry had relatives who were at one time involved with the Bund in simple ways like sports clubs. Similarly, despite the ugly social darwinist origins of groups like Maccabi, their functional role both historically and in Israel was multifaceted.

Today the surviving clubs have taken on new ethnic and political affiliations via the waves of non European Jewry who arrived in Israel. Besides these big four, there were also many smaller groups that existed, affiliated with individual towns, factories, or less widespread political or religious ideologies. In turn we consider it to be foolish when people who learn this history take away a dogged support of one historical group, rather than a broader picture of why these groups existed, and what role they played.



²¹ A man diving into the new swimming pool at the Maccabi Sports Club, Vilna, 1930s.YIVO

²² Ágnes Keleti demonstrating gymnastics at the Fifth Maccabi Games, Israel, 1957.Pierre Gildesgame Maccabi Sports Museum, Israel

In our modern Diasporist lives, we often participate in sport and play in accordance with the rigidity of the monthly gym membership, the weekend league, or the treadmill in the garage gathering dust. Maybe we jog, or maybe we even retain a JCC membership and flavor our exercise with some shadow of the cultural communalism that once existed. In Israel in turn, we see both the commodified and individualist fitness model that exists across the West, or a darker form of political and tribal support for the historical sports teams. With the largest Beitar team's support being defined by an element of ultra-right violence and racial populism, and groups like Hapoel defined by a perception of liberal and Ashkenazi elitism and foolishness.

As this is largely a piece geared towards the Diaspora, we will focus on a Diasporaist reality, but we hope that Israelis will also take some pause from these discussions to examine the above mentioned trends of ethnic and political hooliganism at a time when political extremism and short-sighted brutishness threatens to tear apart the country at its seams.



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For we Diasporists, particularly in North America, there is a strange dynamic. Many young Jews attend summer camps that act as a right of passage. Communal summers defined by awkward experiments with love, inclusive athletic play and our first experiences of independence from the family unit. But this experience operates under the umbrella of the pay to play American summer camp, and it ends as we enter adulthood. Adults are expected to practice fitness not as an act of play or leisure, but as a personal responsibility, often motivated by anxiety or guilt. There is little room for play for play's sake, unless it is buffered by a hefty fee.

²³ Members of the Morgnshtern gymnastics team, Lublin, Poland, 1929.YIVO

In imagining an evolution of Jewish leisure in the Diaspora, we once again find ourselves at a transitory point. **Individual acts of antisemitism in middle and high schools and across universities are some of the most virulent and concrete acts of violence over the last few years.** The moment of isolation for Jewish youth, already a magnification of the broader question of youth isolation in general, needs something more comprehensive than a summer camp to mend it. Likewise, the daily tangible unease that is reemerging as a fact of Jewish life has few outlets beyond the above mentioned individual ones. Where can we go to be amongst each other to let out this building of tension, to relax, to feel powerful, prepared and light? Surely not in Shul.

The moment has arrived for the establishment of Jewish athletic and leisure clubs that are inclusive across age and gender, and communally funded. They should not be expensive, they don't require the construction of new facilities or the panicked dumping of funds into new non-profits or middle men. We can look to the legacy of simple, collectively funded sports clubs as a model for what is needed. The spaces already exist in the form of public recreation facilities, parks and JCCs. What is lacking is the extension of the swim team to the adult, the lengthening of the two week Jiu Jitsu seminar to a cheap Jiu Jitsu club, the ritualization of competition and festivals that are focused entirely around our collective play and relaxation. The demonstration of our identity in outdoor spaces that gives those who would attack or exclude us pause.

In the spirit of both the *Maccabist* and the *Morgensternist* of the past, creativity in how and what even falls under the purview of such clubs is limitless. An esports league, hobbyist clubs, theater and performance groups that organize outdoor festivals, mechanic clubs, book clubs, gunsmiths, ceramic collectives, metal working, art shows, animal husbandry, a yearly fair, a yearly competition that draws on Jewish groups from across the Diaspora, and on and on and on. The point is joy, the point is each other, the point is showmanship, friendships, sex and laughter, a collective unwinding of the screw that continues to turn down upon us.

Undoubtedly, some version of this exists on and off in places with a high density of Jewish life. But for many of us who live in smaller or more assimilated communities across the Diaspora, we find such fulfillment lacking. And everywhere it remains dominated by the cultural norms of atomized gym membership, and lumbering non-profits or for profit companies. We aren't looking for Jewish fitness gurus. We aren't looking for Jewish mega-gyms. We are looking for the carving out of collective Jewish space and laughter that can survive the darker times.

Détante, 5784

So here we sit together, the Zionist, the Assimilationist, the Leftist, the Haredi, and we, the *Luftmenschen*, who drift between. We follow the trail Elijah leaves, finding the *Mezuzot* between the parking lots and shrinking forests.



On the overnight *El Al* flight, your shoulders brush ours as you walk to the back to pray and we doze off with your voice as a blanket. When you flee the arranged marriage, the children, the rigidity and sterility, we catch you and say “don’t cry cousin, you are not alone, you are still among family.” When the old men ignore your warnings (“just the hysteria of teenage girls”) and you are slaughtered in your barracks beds, we are curled next to you screaming. Under the *Chuppah* when you kiss the one you love, whether or not they are a Jew, we are waiting to raise you both on the chair. On the barren hilltop while you stew on dreams of murder and sleep out on the hard ground we sit awake and watch you, envious and horrified. When you wrap yourself in a *Keffiyeh*, and say “here I am, a Jew who will not abide the extinguishing of entire families in my name” we are beside you. We admire that there are some things you will not look the other way from, even if we have lost that piece of soul that kept us from turning away.

²⁴ Chassidim traveling to visit their Rebbe, Zalman Kleiman

We float and we float and we float and our friends fall away around us, **5784** a year of falling friends or perhaps we are rising? **5784** A year of blood, a year of purchased guns, a year with empty seats at the Pesach table, a year of jeering crowds in red hats or checkered scarves, eager to take a selfie with us as proof of the side we stand on. **5784** a year we will remember in quiet moments when we are old, if we grow old. **5784** the year we chose between parents or friends, **5784** the year we dropped out, our doors smeared with red paint. **5784** have you forgotten when they cheered photos of our dead? **5784** You march with them because you fear they will turn against you. **5784** The grandfather on the Kibbutz floor twitching when the bullet enters his back, the *Zaka* man carries a sack of charred children's teeth, **5784** four hundred Jews leaving fire emojis on the video of a Gazan toddler crushed in Khan Younis, **5784** a gloved hand smearing bullets on a pig's head and cursing Amalek **5784** The only good one is a dead one, the *shofar* blown on a ruined block (*"there are no innocents!"*) **5784** Simchat Torah beneath the rockets **5784** the Haredi boy not older than seven, fist raised at the police tank *"It is better to die than to serve in the army!"* **5784** Damn you cousins, we were accepted, we were safe, and you turned them against us again! You will be fleeing to us soon I think, or will we be coming to you? **5784** a 12 year old gang raped in Paris, vengeance for Gaza. 1,200 French Jews on the flight lists for Ben Gurion **5784** the sky rains fire. Missiles collide above the atmosphere, popping like soap bubbles. **5784** a teen in a white mask cracks a student's head open with a pipe, *"what did that fool think would happen if he told us we must leave again?"* **5784** the fire is here, the bloody spear in our hands, the dead ride our backs, they whisper ***"Fight, flee, repent, pray, avenge me, you come from me, do you even remember my name? All I ever amounted to was a pile of teeth in a hill of ash. Your debt is eternal, your burden is eternal, the city is eternal, go up to the ruin and kiss the wall for all of us who couldn't."*** **5784**, 882 years since an Arab (or was it a Crusader?) on a horse trampled the poet Helavi as he arrived at the gates of Jerusalem (*"It would be easy to leave the good things of Spain, it would be glorious to see the dust of the ruined Shrine"*) **5784** four stolen Roman swords found in a dead sea cave. 1,887 years, the blades still sharp, waiting for a Jewish hand to wield them again. **5784** Bar Kochba's sword is redrawn from its sheath.



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²⁵ Arthur Szyk, 1927, Bar Kochba, watercolor and gouache on paper.

We float and we float and we float. Float with us for a while, cousins, just for a moment like birds or ash on the wind. Cross your legs up here above the city, we five together, **the Zionist, the Assimilationist, The Leftist, The Haredi and the Luftmensch**. We are not Northerners and Easterners and Southerners now, our skin changes color depending on the breeze, there is no North, no East, no South, no Israel and no Babylon, only the sky.

Where will we meet when we sink back to the land? At the JCC? In Shul? In the army? On opposite sides of a barricade? Cousins, we must meet. A grand congress? How well did that work in the last century, or the one before? Something smaller, then. Ten of us, whenever we can, wherever we can. Ten of us meeting ten times ten times ten. Ten of us breaking bread, or training to defend each other or save a life, ten of us throwing our phones out the window, ten of us racing across a lake. If you will not let men and women meet then the women will meet alone, and whatever they decide you will not be a part of, brother. Sisters, have you ever met alone? Have you ever turned the space around and made your own peace between Frum and Fray? He rants about queers, has he ever met a queer Jew or are they simply a cartoon he heard about from some Christian podcast? That is not a white nationalist, his skin is brown, his hair is black and he is your nephew who saw his friends butchered in the South, that is not a communist, that is your niece and she remembers when you taught her to say *"Never Again."* This is not America, this is not Israel, this is not Russia, this is not Spain, this is just a forest, a field, a ghetto stoop, this is simply a place where Jews live. On the door there is a sign, it is written in Hebrew, in Aramaic, in English, in Arabic, in Landino and Cyrillic and Ge'ez and Yiddish, ***Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!***



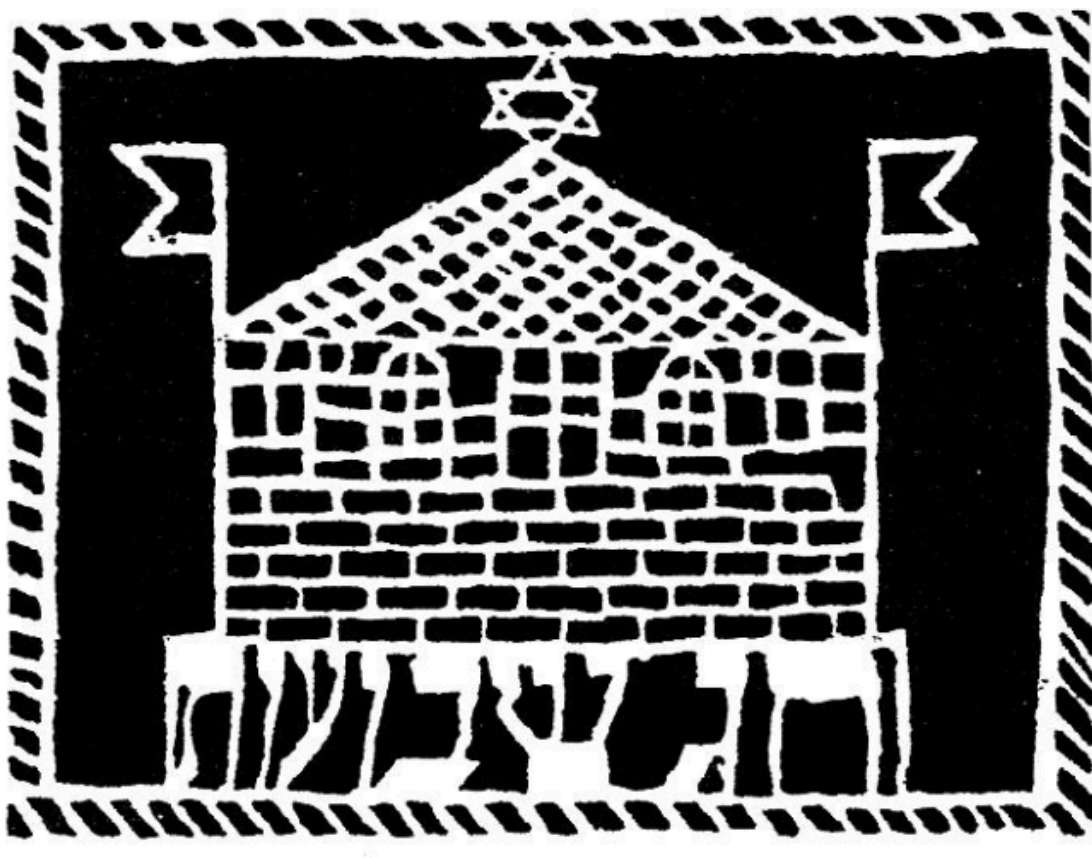
²⁶ "Over the Village" 1914-1918, Marc Chagall

We started this book weeks after the war began, and have added and edited it during the gaps between the rest of our lives. We have experienced the past year as two close friends with thinning wallets and thinning communities. These writings are the result of the cheerful, despairing and self-aggrandizing conversations we've had together. In our dreams, our children will make happy realities of our fantasies born of despair. We feel confident that we are the last generation of the old world. The weight of age gnaws at us already. How did it happen so fast? There is still time to find each other, there are still peaceful places to live. There is still a will there, on which to glide for another 1000 years across all the beauty and madness that is coming.

We wrote this piece for Jews. That does not mean that we believe any of the concepts we have discussed bear less weight for anyone else. We believe that most are natural conclusions that any healthy ethnic, social or religious community with true depth will come to in their own words. But the subcultures who usually write self-important pamphlets are only as deep as a piece of paper. The national politics are nothing, this day to day amnesia is that last collective delusion before the water rises and the smoke comes and the fires spread, driving us all in every direction.

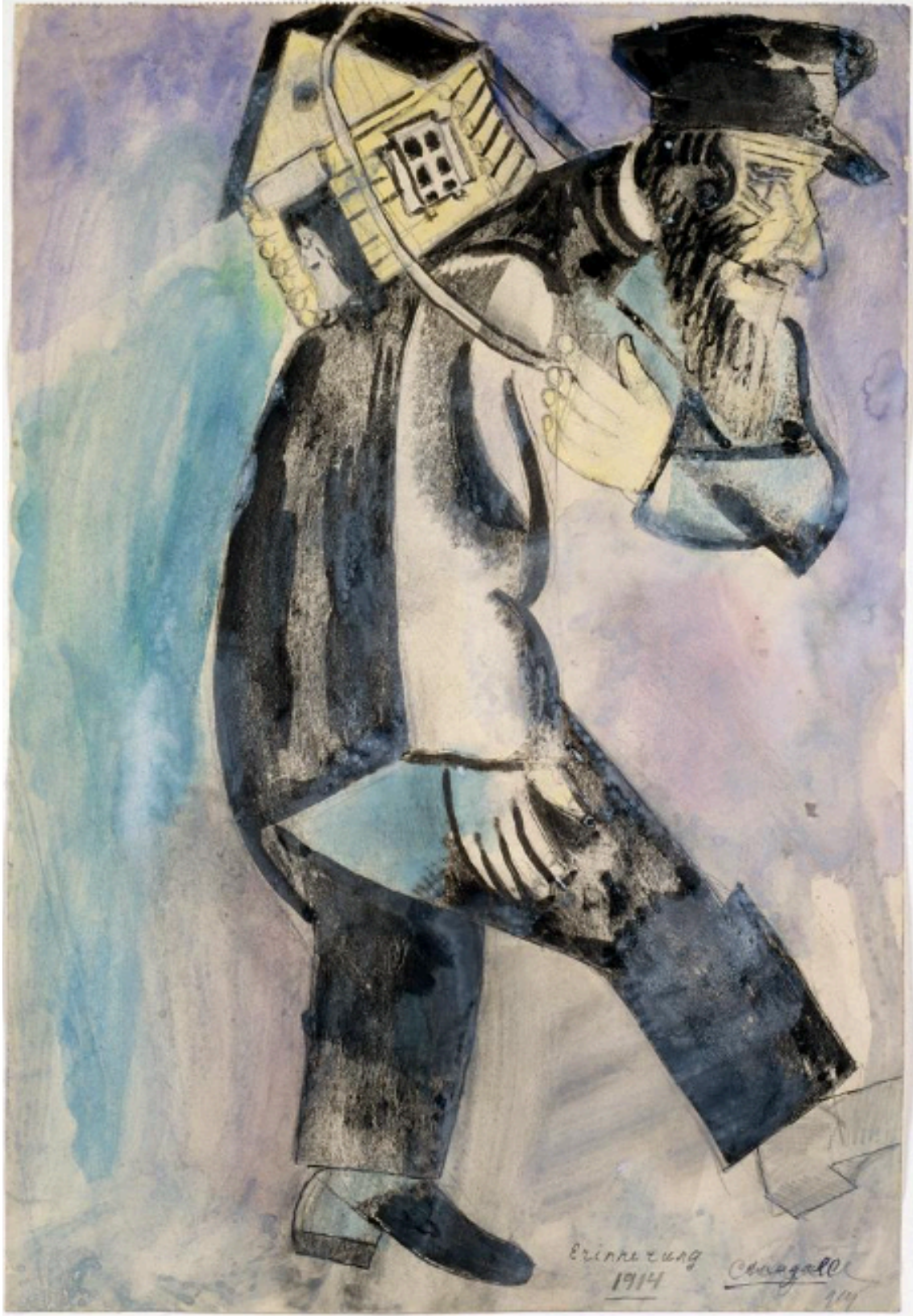
What good is it to write for money when the water from the tap is filled with PFAS? Should I teach my daughter that she can be anything, or should I teach her to use a rifle? We could have written this for anyone. But we are Jews, so we wrote it for you, cousins. For the intermarried, for the Zionist, for the liberal, for the Haredim, for the alienated queer, for the fascist, for the anarchist for the communist, for the newly friendless, for the wise child, the rebellious child, the simple child and the child who can not ask. Shalom, cousins. We'll find you in the places that the wind carries us.

-Di Luftmenschen



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²⁷ Shavuosl. Artist unknown, Kock, Poland, 1908. (Professor Dov Noy, Hebrew University, Jerusalem)



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²⁸ Marc Chagall, "Remembrance" 1914